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Brzezinski Remark Stirs Fear of Security Breach

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WASHINGTON, April 25—A remark by President Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, about the South Korean airliner forced down in the Soviet Union, has upset and troubled intelligence specialists who say that Mr. Brzezinski may have breached security.

Mr. Brzezinski disclosed last Friday that Soviet jet interceptors had apparently fired at the South Korean airliner that entered Soviet airspace and was forced to land in northwestern Russia.

The disclosure came at a time when the Russians had acknowledged that their fighter planes had intercepted the airliner. But they did not say they had fired at the plane, and it was only more than a day later, when the passengers reached Helsinki, Finland, that the survivors disclosed the Soviet attack.

Intelligence officials said that Mr. Brzezinski apparently obtained his information about the Soviet attack, in which two passengers were killed, through secret United States monitoring of Soviet communications and a reading of radio conversations between Russian pilots.

But a spokesman for the National Security Council said that Mr. Brzezinski was citing a published report about the Soviet attack by the Jiji Press, a domestic Japanese news agency. The spokesman, Jerrold L. Schecter, said that Mr. Brzezinski made his comment in an informal chat on Friday with reporters in the office of Jody Powell, the White House press secretary.

More than one day later, the surviving passengers confirmed the Soviet attack to reporters in Helsinki.

Soviet Countermeasures Possible

Mr. Brzezinski did not mention Jiji Press in his chat with reporters about the incident.

Although the United States and the Soviet Union maintain an elaborate variety of sophisticated intelligence-gathering electronic devices in satellites, planes and land bases, Mr. Brzezinski's disclosure was given weight and stirred considerable speculation because of his position, and was viewed by some members of the intelligence community as potentially compromising.

Intelligence sources indicated that the public disclosure of such intelligence was likely to tell the Soviet Union about the effectiveness of United States intelligence work. This could lead to Soviet countermeasures, intelligence officials said.

"Obviously we don't want to signal to the Soviets to what extent we monitor their signals," said one intelligence source. "At the same time we get unhappy about senior policy people making these kinds of disclosures."

Intelligence officials refused to discuss specific methods that are used in monitoring Soviet air defenses, and brushed aside questions about the kinds of equipment and devices that are used, and what kind of results are achieved.

Effectiveness of Monitoring

Intelligence officials were also reluctant to concede that Mr. Brzezinski had actually breached security by the disclosure. Intelligence sources only went as far as saying that Mr. Brzezinski may have unwittingly given the Russians information about the effectiveness of United States monitoring of Soviet air defenses.

But Maj. Gen. George J. Keegan Jr.,

retired, the former head of Air Force intelligence, and now an outspoken critic of the Administration's defense policies, said in a telephone interview:

"Mr. Brzezinski's disclosure does represent a compromise of high-security intelligence. The question at issue is whether the discussion was inadvertent or intended. If the latter, then some assessment of risk versus political advantage must have been taken by the White House."

He added that if the disclosure was inadvertent, "it could be quite harmful from a technical point of view."

"The Soviets could alter codes and undertake other immediate measures that might severely handicap the monitoring of Soviet air defense communications," he said.